

# *The Johnson Letter*

From the desk of  
Michigan State Senator

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## **Senate calls for health insurance feasibility study for educators**

As part of the K-12 budget, Senator Johnson has called for a feasibility study that could provide options for lowering educators health care costs and put up to \$200 million back into education per year.

Johnson introduced the budget amendment following numerous requests from superintendents criticizing rising health care costs and voicing their opinions on ways to save essential school programs.

“We are working hard to help save all the money we can for school districts, while maintaining quality health care for all educators,” Johnson said. “Conducting a study will help determine the best available options to address health care costs that are spiraling out of control.”

The proposed study will determine the practicality and economic advantages of moving all educators to a state-based health care system. This includes public schools, community colleges, state universities and intermediate school districts. Other states are researching similar plans, while superintendents have suggested a possible pool for all state employees.

According to a study released by the Association of School Business Officials International, schools have had to trim spending on building maintenance, teaching positions and technology upgrades to counterbalance health care costs. Of those schools who responded to the survey, more than half claimed the amount spent on health benefits had gone up more than 21 percent during the past three years. In addition, the Detroit News reported a significant attribution to layoffs was the rising cost of health care and retirement.

“Superintendents have said school programs and teachers will be cut unless health care costs come down. We are trying to help teachers keep their benefits without jeopardizing essential programs and jobs,” Johnson said.

In Illinois, Gov. Rod Blagojevich is introducing an Education Reform plan that includes a state-wide purchasing pool for health insurance and a streamlined purchasing plan. The projected annual savings from the changes are between \$80 million and \$180 million per year.



**SENATOR JOHNSON INTRODUCES  
WENDY WAGNER, BLOOMFIELD  
HILLS, ON THE SENATE FLOOR FOR A  
SPECIAL GIFT OF LIFE ORGAN DONA-  
TION PRESENTATION**

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## **Gift of Life Day at the Capitol**

Wendy Wagner of Bloomfield Hills last week shared her personal experiences with Gift of Life Michigan and officially kicked off Michigan Gift of Life Day at the Capitol. The need for more organ and tissue donors is critical, last year 121 people in Michigan died waiting for a lifesaving organ transplant. Over 2,500 Michiganders are waiting for an organ transplant currently.

To sign up on the Donor Registry, contact Gift of Life Michigan online at [www.giftoflifemichigan.org](http://www.giftoflifemichigan.org) or call (800) 482-4881. Gift of Life Michigan is a full service organ and tissue recovery organization that provides all services necessary for organ, tissue and eye donation. It is important to note that signing the back of your driver's license is not enough. Since the driver's license is often never located, signing the Donor Registry is the best way to ensure your wish to become a donor is carried out.

To learn more about organ and tissue donation and transplantation, order your free *Give So Others Can Live* six minute video that conveys the healing power of donation through heart warming donor family and transplant recipients interviews. If you are interested in Donor Registry Brochures and/or a trained transplant recipient or donor family member to speak at your next social, religious or work event, please contact Gift of Life Michigan at (800) 482-4881.

## **“Flagstar Bank” Fire Safety First Package Becomes Law**

Following nearly three years of concessions, the Fire Safety First Package, a set of four bills requiring the installation of smoke alarms in multiple dwellings and historical buildings became law. State Sen. Shirley Johnson, R-Troy, sponsored three of the four bills in the package and voiced her appreciation to colleagues.

“Too many lives have senselessly been taken because a smoke detector was not installed on the premises. If this legislation results in just one life saved, then we have done our job,” Johnson said. “I appreciate my colleagues’ support, as well as Flagstar Bank for their efforts.”

The first measure, Senate Bill 337 (PA 64 of 2004) requires a person owning a class “A” multiple dwelling constructed prior to Nov. 6, 1974, to be equipped with a single-station or multiple-station smoke alarm that complies with the state construction code. Multiple dwellings include tenement houses, apartment houses, duplex apartments and apartment hotels. SB 742 (PA 65 of 2004) augments this measure by granting the Bureau of Construction Codes and Fire Safety the authority to promulgate rules regarding the installation of smoke alarms in one, two or multiple family dwelling units built prior to Nov. 6, 1974.

The other half of the package, Senate Bills 338 and 339 (PA 66 and 67 of 2004), address municipally designated historical sites. PA 66 of 2004 mandates that the preservation of facilities, buildings or structures determined to be a historic site by a municipality shall be equipped, at a minimum, with a fire alarm system. PA 67 of 2004 permits a municipal historic district commission to withhold a “certificate of appropriateness” to an applicant requesting an exterior renovation, unless the applicant certifies that a fire alarm system or smoke alarm will be installed prior to the project's completion.

“Due credit is owed to Flagstar Bank, whose commitment to cultivating this initiative from an idea to reality proved essential in the bills’ passage,” Johnson said.

The legislation arose after Flagstar Bank provided Johnson with a 2001 study confirming that 148 people perished in Michigan fires and requested the introduction of legislation complementing their smoke detector initiatives.

In 2002 the total number of fire fatalities rose to 167, with 77 percent of all residential fatalities derived from dwellings with either no smoke alarm or one that was not operational. “Many of these lives could have been saved if a smoke alarm had been properly installed on the premises,” Johnson said.

## **Sen. Johnson to MDOT: Drive used cars, spend \$5 million on road projects**

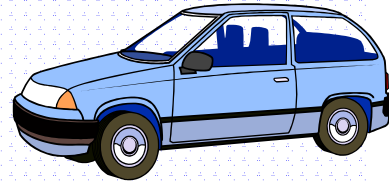
Taxpayers should be up in arms over a recent proposal by the Michigan Department of Transportation to spend \$5 million of funding on new passenger vehicles for MDOT employees instead of road projects, said Sen. Shirley Johnson, R-Troy.

“The only thing more absurd than buying new vehicles for MDOT employees is the justification the department is offering,” Johnson said. “The money MDOT wants to spend on new cars could pave miles of roads in Michigan.”

MDOT’s proposal which was approved by the State Administrative Board, claims the lack of approval for the \$5 million “would negatively impact their [MDOT’s] operating cost and ability to maintain state highways, bridges, maintenance operations, which would impact public safety.”

“Spending \$5 million on new cars for MDOT employees at a time when Michigan is facing a nearly \$1 billion budget deficit is irresponsible,” Johnson said. “This is shameful government waste.”

Currently, \$5 million can re-pave 50 miles of highway roads. The 2004 Transportation budget is currently in the House Appropriations Transportation Subcommittee.



## **Water-Discharge Permits Signed into Law**

Measures that will protect the state’s freshwater and groundwater resources by requiring water-discharge permit holders pay an annual fee were signed into law this week. Senate Bill 252 establishes the National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System fund and requires permit holders to pay an application and annual permit fee based on designations from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. SB 560 establishes a fee structure for groundwater discharge. Money collected will be used to fund groundwater monitoring by the state Department of Environmental Quality.

## MEAP Under Review

A bipartisan group of Michigan senators this week announced a five-bill package that would replace the Michigan Educational Assessment Program test for high-school students with one based on a college-entrance exam. The new comprehensive test would prepare students for college and the workplace.

The legislation follows the recommendation of the Education Alliance of Michigan, which issued a report earlier this year urging the Legislature to study the replacement of the high-school MEAP test. The proposed test, called the Michigan Merit Exam, would use a combination of a college-admissions test, a workplace skills exam and a social studies component. The test would first be given to students in 2006. The effort is supported by a broad coalition of state leaders in secondary and post-secondary education.

### APRIL HELPFUL HINTS

#### Consumer Resources on the Web

Plan a vacation in Michigan, to check out fairs and festivals around the state by visiting:

<http://travel.michigan.org/events/>.

Celebrate the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Michigan week, May 15-21, for local events and resources visit: <http://www.michigan.gov/hal/>.

Request a copy of the Surgeon General's Healthy Michigan 2010 Report on chronic disease and healthy lifestyles by visiting:

<http://www.michigan.gov/mdch/>

Save a life. Register to be an organ and tissue donor by visiting <http://www.michigan.gov/sos/>

Make your voice and vote count. Register to vote. Print off a Voter Registration form at:



<http://www.michigan.gov/sos/>.

Find resources and information for citizens, businesses and nonprofits on the U.S. Government's Official Web Portal, located at

<http://www.firstgov.gov/>.

Send a White House birthday greeting to a U.S. citizen who is over 80 years old, find information at: <http://www.whitehouse.gov/greeting/>.

Request a free state map to navigate your way around the state by contacting Senator Johnson's office toll-free (877) SEN-13<sup>th</sup> or by e-mailing [SenSJohnson@senate.michigan.gov](mailto:SenSJohnson@senate.michigan.gov).

Find resources for Older American Month, celebrated in May, at

<http://www.aoa.gov/press/oam/oam.asp>.

<http://www.aoa.gov/press/oam/oam.asp>.

#### Questions or Comments?

Contact Senator Shirley Johnson

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